

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

Taking the keys from his girdle, he said before us all: 'Is there no one here who will go to distribute and give away for the love of God what I have in my cell ?' Then uprose Niccolo di Mino and Tommaso di Guelfaccio, and, taking the keys, they said to him : ' What would you have us do ?' And Master Gabriele answered them : ° Go into my cell, and whatever you find therein distribute and give away for the love of God, so that nothing be left me in it save my breviary.' " They took him at his word, distributed his books among the other friars of the convent who were students, and gave the rest to the poor, leaving only what was sufficient for a humble Franciscan friar of the strict observance. Gabriele himself shortly after went to Santa Croce at Florence, and there set himself to serving the friars in the refectory and other acts of humility, although he was still the minister of the province. Master Giovanni, also, gave away all he had, keeping only the breviary, and became one of Catherine's immediate followers, afterwards accompanying her in her travels until her death. He was one of the three confessors who were deputed by the Pope to hear the confessions of those who were converted by her means.¹

It was doubtless through Maestro Giovanni Tantucci that Catherine was brought into touch with the hermits of Lecceto. The convent of San Salvatore di Lecceto was the head house in Tuscany of the Augustinian hermits, *' a blessed place," writes its seventeenth century historian, Ambrogio Landucci, "in which the Most High chose to work so many wonders." It lies beyond Belcaro, a few miles westward of Siena, in what still remains of a once glorious forest of ilex trees. The place was originally known as the Convento di Selva, the Convent of the Wood, which was also called the *Selva di Lago*, because of the lake or swamp (afterwards drained) that lay at the foot of the hill upon which, solitary and austere, the convent still rises. From remote middle ages, wonderful legends had lingered round the convent and forest. Miraculous waters had gushed out of the arid soil; the stones had taken mystical colours in commemoration of Him¹ *Cotttestatio Francisci de Malavoltis*, cap. iii., MS. «/», pp. 4.4.1-445.